

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 863

INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 6683

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BR

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY RESPONSE TO GEISEL SPEECH SETS OFF
STORM OF PROTEST

REF: BRASILIA 6516

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN UNCHARACTERISTICALLY HARD-HITTING STATEMENT, MDB PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES SCORED "SWITCH OF SIGNALS" ON DISTENSION, REITERATED MDB POSITION CALLING FOR REVOCATION OF EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES, REFLECTED "IRONY AND DEMEANING REBUKES" TO THOSE CALLING FOR DIALOGUE, ENDORSED MDB CONCERNS OF POSSIBLE "WITCH-HUNT," PRAISED GEISEL FOR DEMOCRATIC STAGES ALREADY ACHIEVED, AND VOWED MDB WOULD CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE. FOLLOWING INDICATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL DISPLEASURE AT THE STATEMENT, ARENA PRESIDENT TETRONIO PORTELLA QUICKLY LASHED OUT AT IT AS "UNUSUAL, INJURIOUS, INSULTING, AND CALUMNIOUS," AND DECLARED GUIMARAES HAD "AGITATED THE CLIMATE OF DEBATE." RUMORS THAT GUIMARAES WOULD BE CASSATED WERE DENIED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. PORTELLA WAS OF COURSE SEEKING TO SHOW ARENA CAPABLE OF CONTAINING THE OPPOSITION, AND HE IN FACT MADE CLEAR THAT HIS LARGER PURPOSE WAS THAT OF KEEPING ALIVE SOME HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF DISTENSION.

AT THE MOMENT IT APPEARS THAT THIS POLITICAL STORM

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IS DYING DOWN, AND IN THE MEANTIME, WHILE SOME OPPOSITION

DISCOMFORT WITH THE GEISEL SPEECH IS STILL BEING EXPRESSED, SOME OF THE USUAL DISTENTION-RELATED THEMES--CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, POSSIBLE PARTY REFORMULATION AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE--ARE STILL BEING DISCUSSED. END SUMMARY.

1. ULYSSES GUIMARAES RELEASED AUGUST 5 THE TEXT OF A NOTE ANALYZING AND REPLYING TO PRESIDENT GEISEL'S AUGUST 1 SPEECH. BEGINNING WITH THE REFRAIN, "THE MORE IT CHANGES, THE MORE IT REMAINS THE SAME" GUIMARAES DECLARED, "THE PRESIDENTIAL TALK, MOMENTARILY I HOPE, CHANGED THE DIRECTION OF TRAFFIC. 'DISTENSION' IS NOT THE ROAD TO DEMOCRATIZATION, BUT THE CONTINUATION OF IA-5, OF DECREE-LAW 477, THE INACCEPTABILITY OF AMNESTY. SURPOSED BY THE SWITCH OF SIGNALS, THOSE WHO THOUGHT THEY WERE TRAVELING TOWARD LIBERTY FOUND THEMSELVES GOING THE WRONG WAY (I.E. ON A ONE-WAY STREET) AND THREATENED WITH CHOLERIC PENALTIES." QUOTING MONTESQUIEU THAT "ANY MAN THAT HOLDS POWER IS BROUGHT TO ABUSE IT" ULYSSES WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC EXERCISES NOT JUST THE EXECUTIVE POWER BUT ALSO POWERS "OF AND ABOVE" (DO & SOBRE) THE LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES AND THAT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WOULD NOT, AS GEISEL CHARGED, REDUCE THE POWERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BUT, RATHER "RETURN TRANSFERRED JURISDICTIONS TO THEIR LEGITIMATE HOLDERS."

2. GUIMARAES NOTED THAT THE MDB HAS OFFERED CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS, ENDORSED BY THE POPULACE IN THE NOVEMBER 15 ELECTION, AND INVITED THE GOVERNMENT TO DEBATE IDEAS ON POLITICAL REFORM. THE IDEAS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM WERE "WINNOWED FROM RECENT CONSTITUTIONS OF FRANCE, ITALY, WEST GERMANY, JAPAN AND SWEDEN, AMONG OTHERS", SINCE "IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD NOT IMPORT THE MODEL ADOPTED BY IDI AMIN DADA, SINCE NOTHING IS MORE OUT-MODED (ULTRAPASSADO) THAN A GOVERNMENT BASED ON FORCE." ULYSSES THEN ASKED, "IF EDIFYING AND RECENT EXAMPLES FROM OTHER PEOPLES DON'T SERVE, IF THE POLITICAL PROPOSALS OF THE OPPOSITION ARE UNACCEPTABLE AND 'OUT-MODED' WHAT WILL DO?", AND CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO STATE WHAT IT IS LOOKING FOR AND TO END THE VAGUENESS OF THE PAST ELEVEN YEARS.

3. GUIMARAES OBSERVED POINTEDLY THAT "RECOURSE TO IRONY AND CONFIDENTIAL

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DEMEANING REBUKES TO INTERLOCUTORS WHO CALL FOR THE DIALOGUE ESSENTIAL TO BRAZIL REPRESENT FORMS OF ESCAPISM WHICH NEITHER DELUDE NOR PERSUADE," AND SPECIFICALLY ENDORSED MDB SENATOR ROBERTO SATURNINO BRAGA'S WARNING "AGAINST THE SCARECROW OF COMMUNISM STIMULATING THE OFFENSIVE OF BRUTAL AND INQUITOUS REPRESSION AGAINST CITIZENS, REVIVING 'MCCARTHYISM' AND 'THE WITCH-HUNT'". DRAWING NEAR THE END OF HIS DECLARATION GUIMARAES DECLARED, HOWEVER, "THE ELECTIONS OF NOVEMBER 15, THE DISTENSION

IN THE CENSORSHIP OF THE COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA, AND THE CONTACTS WITH THE POLITICAL SECTOR, LIMITED TO THE SITUATION, ARE DEMOCRATIC STAGES WHICH THE COUNTRY OWES TO PRESIDENT GEISEL, A PATRIOTIC BRAZILIAN AND A GOOD ONE." GUIMARAES ADDED, "THE OPPOSITION KNOWS THAT THE POWER ALWAYS HAS PROBLEMS WITH ITS STRUCTURE AND WITH ITS INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS."

4. GUIMARAES CALLED AGAIN FOR THE REVOCATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ACT 5 AND FOR REFORM OF THE 1969 CONSTITUTION, SINCE THESE STEPS ARE THE BASIC PREMISES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "STATE OF LAW" IN BRAZIL, AND HE BOUND THE PARTY "TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE, AWAIT THE DIALOGUE, THE SCALING BY STEPS, IF THIS IS NECESSARY FOR FINAL EMANICIPATION, THE SUBSTITUTE PROPOSAL FOR A DEFENSE MECHANISM FOR THE STATE, WHICH DOESN'T IMPLY IRRESPONSIBILITY OR THREATS TO THE LIFE, LIBERTY, PHYSICAL INTEGRITY OR PROPERTY OF CITIZENS."

5. SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE MDB LEADERSHIP IN THE SENATE, LAZARO BARBOSA SAID, "AT THIS TIME IT WOULD BE NAIVE TO BELIEVE THAT WE CAN HAVE 'A SLOW, THOUGHTFUL AND PROGRESSIVE DISTENSION' WHEN THERE IS THE CERTAINTY THAT ACTS OF FORCE WILL NOT BE RENOUNCED, INJUSTICES RECTIFIED AND HOPE REIMPLANTED."

6. LAZARO BARBOSA THEN WENT ON TO TALK ABOUT SPECIFIC PARTS OF GEISEL'S SPEECH. "THE SECURITY ORGANS DO A SERVICE TO THE NATION, ADOPTING MEASURES AGAINST PREPARATION OF EXTREMISTS OF THE LEFT," BUT HE WENT ON TO ASK "IF THESE SECURITY ORGANS ARE ALSO ADOPTING PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST CONSPIRACIES OF EXTREMISTS OF THE RIGHT." HE ALSO ASKED WHAT THE ADVANTAGES OF THE EXCEPTIONAL ACTS WERE IF, AS THE PRESIDENT STATED, ORDER AND TRANQUILITY WERE MAINTAINED. "I ALSO DON'T UNDERSTAND IF REVOCATION OF IA-5 AND OF (DECREE) 477, THE FULL RETURN OF HABEUS CORPUS AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF LEGISLATIVE

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POWERS ARE CONSIDERED AN UNMASKED NOSTALGIA FOR THE NOT RECENT PAST." CALLING CORRUPTION A "DELAYED ACTION BOMB," LAZARO WONDERED WHY NO MENTION HAD BEEN MADE OF THIS PROBLEM IN THE SPEECH.

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7. SUMMING UP, LAZARO BARBOSA SALUTED GEISEL FOR EASING CENSORSHIP AND FOR PERMITTING PAST ERRORS TO BE KNOWN, BUT SAID THE MDB WOULD BE REMISS IF IT DID NOT LOOK FOR, BESIDES WHAT THE PRESIDENT SAID IN HIS SPEECH WHAT HE DIDN'T SAY. "WE THINK THIS IS THE OPPORTUNE TIME TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT WE ARE A MATURE AND POLITICALLY STABLE NATION, AND THERE IS NO GREATER STABILITY THAN THAT FOUNDED IN LAW."

8. IN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE SENATE MAJORITY VICE-LEADER JOSE SARNEY REBUKED GUIMARAES FOR HIS LACK OF "SERENITY" AND ATTACKED HIS STATEMENT AS "DEFORMED", "PAMPHLET-LIKE", AND "UNSEEMLY". FOLLOWING DAY (AUGUST 6) SAW A POLITICAL STORM BREAK IN REACTION TO GUIMARAES' NOTE, AS PLANALTO (PRESIDENTIAL) PALACE SPOKESMEN EARLY TERMED IT "INSULTING AND SLANDEROUS". RESPONDING PROMPTLY, ARENA PRESIDENT (AND SENATE MAJORITY LEADER) PETRONIO PORTELLA INTERRUPTED A MEETING TO LASH OUT, CALLING THE GUIMARAES STATEMENT "UNUSUAL, INJURIOUS, INSULTING, AND CALUMNIOUS", ACCUSING HIM OF PLAYING TO THE MDB'S RADICAL MINORITY, AND CHARGING THAT HE HAD THUS "AGITATED THE CLIMATE OF DEBATE". LATER IN THE DAY, PLANALTO OFFICIALS WERE QUOTED AS DECLARING PORTELLA'S STATEMENT SATISFACTORY, AND CITED GEISEL SPECIFICALLY IN DENYING RUMORS THAT IA-5 WOULD BE USED TO CASSATE GUIMARAES.

9. ALTHOUGH THE MATTER MIGHT HAVE ENDED THERE, A SUBSEQUENT CONFIDENTIAL

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EXCHANGE DID OCCUR, BEGINNING WHEN JUSTICE MINISTER FALCAO, TRAVELING IN THE NORTHEAST, WAS ASKED BY REPORTERS ABOUT THE GUIMARAES STATEMENT. REFLECTING THE FINDING OF LESE-MAJESTE THAT ALSO OCCURRED IN OTHER COMMENT, FALCAO DECLARED, "BY (REASON OF) THE POSITION HE HOLDS AND, EQUALLY, THE MAN HE IS,

PRESIDENT ERNESTO GEISEL CANNOT, UNDER ANY PRETEXT, BE A TARGET OF OFFENSES AND INJURIES, DIRECT OR INDIRECT. ARENA REACTED VERY WELL, IN DEFENSE OF THE CHIEF OF THE NATION, AND INCIDENTS OF THIS SORT ARE UNDERSIRABLE. IT IS GOOD THAT THEY NOT BE REPEATED." RESPONDING TO THE OMINOUS OVERTONES OF THE LAST PHRASE, MDB SECRETARY GENERAL THALES RAMALHO DECLARED FALCAO'S STATEMENT "A THREAT WHICH WE REPEL, VEHEMENTLY".

10. COMMENT: GUIMARAES' STATEMENT WAS, IN FACT, UNUSUALLY HARD-HITTING AND ROUGH-EDGED, A CONTRAST WITH HIS PAST STATEMENTS WHICH COMBINED FIRM PRINCIPLE WITH SMOOTH DELIVERY. HE PROVIDED A PARTIAL EXPLANATION WHEN HE SUBSEQUENTLY TOLD A JOURNALIST BRAZIL IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING "THE MOMENT OF GREAT DEFINITIONS--EITHER WE MARCH TOWARD THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT, EVEN GRADUAL, OF A DEMOCRATIC REGIME, OR NOT ONLY IS THE SYSTEM OF TUTELAGE CONSOLIDATED, BUT EXCEPTION IS CHARACTERIZED AS PERMANENT". ANOTHER OF HIS PURPOSES, IT WAS NOTED (INTER ALIA BY CARLOS CATELLO BRANCO), WAS THAT OF PRE-EMPTING EVEN MORE STRIDENT STATEMENTS BY MDB RADICALS. THE ENERGY OF PORTELLA'S RESPONSE WAS AT LEAST PARTLY, OF COURSE, FOR SHOW, AIMED AT PORTRAYING ARENA AS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENDER OF THE PRESIDENT AND QUITE CAPABLE OF SETTING THINGS TO RIGHTS WHEN HE IS ATTACKED. IN THIS SENSE, PORTELLA'S REACTION WAS REMINISCENT OF THE ARENA RESPONSE TO THE MDB ORATORICAL INITIATIVE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PRESENT CONGRESS.

11. PORTELLA'S OUTBURST ALSO HAD A LARGER AND LESS SELFISH PURPOSE, HOWEVER, A PURPOSE SIGNALLED WHEN HE TOLD LISTENERS THAT HE HAD JUST "PROPITIATED A MEETING WITH THE FUTURE". THE POINT, OF COURSE, IS THAT ARENA'S VIABILITY AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT, ITS ABILITY TO WITHSTAND AND CONTAIN THE OPPOSITION, HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN SEEN AS VITAL TO ANY FURTHER PROGRESS FOR DISTENSION. PORTELLA'S UNSPOKEN POINT, THAT THE GUIMARAES STATEMENT CAN ONLY STIFFEN HARDLINE OPPOSITION TO THE MDB AND ANY THOUGHT OF ITS ASSUMING ANY KIND OF MEANINGFUL POWER, IS CERTAINLY CORRECT, ALTHOUGH IT IS POSSIBLE TO WONDER WHETHER

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THE STATEMENT ADDS TO THAT OPPOSITION SIGNIFICANTLY.

12. IN ANY CASE, IT APPEARS AT THE MOMENT THAT THE CURRENT STORM IS ALREADY DYING DOWN. WHAT WE FIND MORE INTERESTING IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE MESSAGE OF THE GEISEL SPEECH IS BEING ABSORBED AND ACCEPTED IN A POLITICAL MILIEU WHICH REMAINS FIXATED ON THE SUBJECT OF DISTENSION. WHILE SOME SIGNS OF UNEASE ABOUT THE "COMMUNIST INFILTRATION" POINT IN THE GEISEL SPEECH (REFTEL) HAVE CONTINUED, AND OPPOSITIONISTS ARE STILL DECLARING THEMSELVES "DISENCHANTED AND FRUSTRATED", TALK OF POSSIBLE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT IS GOING ON, AND ATTENTION HAS REMAINED FOCUSED ON THE NOVEMBER 1976 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

AS THE POINT AT WHICH SOME FURTHER CHANGE--SUCH AS PARTY REFORMULATION--MAY BE ANTICIPATED. IN THE MEANTIME, POLITICAL CIRCLES, EVER EAGER AND EVEN DESPERATE FOR "SIGNS", ARE NOW DECLARING THAT THE CHOICE FOR THE NEW ARENA PRESIDENT (TO REPLACE PORTELLA IN SEPTEMBER) WILL "DEFINE THE PATH". ON THE OTHER HAND, O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO REPORTED THAT MILITARY CIRCLES IN BRASILIA CONSIDER THAT GEISEL'S SPEECH IN EFFECT DEFINED THE PATH, AND IN A WAY WHICH SHOWED HIS ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR VIEW. THEY APPEAR, OF COURSE, TO BE ENTIRELY RIGHT. END COMMENT
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